

January 2012

## Academic Program Database

### Information Item

Proactive planning that identifies where growth is needed in the higher education system depends upon solid research and planning tools. In 2011, the U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences awarded Washington \$17.3 million to build the Evergreen State P-20 Program, a state longitudinal data system (SLDS) that will incorporate education and workforce data from multiple state agency partners to better inform statewide and regional policy and planning.

The system will provide a wider array of data, improved analytic capability, and greater access while continuing to include protections for individual privacy and confidentiality in compliance with state and federal regulations.

A portion of these U.S. Department of Education fund dollars, \$586,000, was awarded to the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) to build a program database to provide an accurate listing of *all* academic programs that fall under HECB responsibility. Until now, the HECB has maintained three disparate sources of data regarding authorization of the following:

1. New degree programs offered by the public baccalaureate institutions.
2. Degree programs offered to veterans through GI Bill benefits.
3. Institutions of higher education authorized to operate in Washington, including the degrees they offer.

Because the HECB data for public and private programs have resided in different data locations that are not aligned, it is not currently possible to provide a picture of where there may be gaps in program offerings to students throughout the state.

To conduct effective statewide strategic planning for higher education in Washington, questions such as “How many and what types of programs are available to the residents of Snohomish County?” must be addressed. To answer such a simple question today, HECB staff would need to individually contact more than 60 public and private institutions.

One of the most important uses of the new database is to provide a critical tool in the state coordination and planning “tool kit.” For example, the *System Design Plan* provides structure and a process for the expansion of programs, facilities and technology to improve access to higher education in Washington.

In 2010, the Legislature passed SSB 6355, which established the System Design Plan as state law. The System Design Plan complements and carries forward the goals of *the Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education*—most importantly the goal to significantly increase degree production. But without strong planning tools, such as the program database, it is difficult to implement the System Design Plan without huge demands upon both HECB and institutional staff time.

The new academic program database will consolidate existing disparate information on academic programs into a single program database to provide fast, accurate electronic information. The database will include all institutions operating in Washington and all programs available by location—main campus, branch campus, teaching site, university center, and distance learning.

When combined with other components of the P-20 Evergreen Data System, the HECB program database will allow staff to add information about enrollments, completions and other variables to programs to address policy questions such as whether completion rates in the same or similar programs vary by location, delivery mode, or institutions.

It also will allow the HECB to institute a new systematic program review process that tracks student enrollment patterns across sectors, identifies gaps in regional program delivery, and helps expand program diversity in targeted regions of the state. A systematic program review process is an important tool in the tool kit to implement the System Design Plan.

Another important feature of the new program database is that it will provide up-to-date information to institutions and to students. For institutions, the database will enhance the user interface and data quality for the existing database of *all* currently approved degree programs—public and private. For students, it will provide a list of institutions, by location, that offer programs in areas of interest.

Building a comprehensive academic program database has been attempted three times before over the past 15 years. Efforts failed because of a lack of resources and key employee turnover. The current effort has adequate resources and staff devoting significant time and attention to the project. Twelve HECB staff members from both the information technology and policy divisions are involved in building the database. The target date for completion of the program database is June 30, 2012. As of the date of this report, the project is on track to meet that target deadline. (The Project Schedule is attached to this Information Item.)

The November 2011 Quality Assurance Report for the HECB program database, required by the Office of Financial Management to ensure that each portion of the SLDS grant is successful, was positive and made no additional recommendations. The report noted that the HECB project is making good progress. It has strong project leadership, project management, technical support, and user participation. Its objectives are clear and well supported by its leaders and users. Internal staff and contractor capacity appear sufficient to support and complete the project as scheduled. To date, the project has completed its data and functional requirements and has moved into development.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Quality Assurance Report. Washington State Higher Education Coordinating Board Academic Data System. Part of the OFM P20 Program.” (November 11, 2011). Author: Briskin Consulting for the Office of Financial Management, State of Washington.

Academic program databases are tools that a number of states routinely use to help make wise decisions regarding the development of new programs and overall system-wide coordination. The HECB academic program database will allow the state to be more proactive in identifying where programs are needed and in providing a listing of current programs to students, parents, institutions, and other stakeholders.

Consolidation of public and private program information into a single database is a necessary tool for Washington to track progress on its goals to increase educational attainment.

## Appendix A

### P20 HECB Project Schedule

Major Activity	Projected Start Date	Projected End Date
<b>Data Requirements &amp; Documentation</b>	09/19/11	06/29/12
Analysis & Requirements	09/20/11	11/04/11
User Stories	09/20/11	11/04/11
Data Clean-up & Input	11/04/11	03/20/12
Data Verification (by institutions)	12/27/11	03/01/12
Document Scanning	12/19/11	04/23/12
System Documentation	04/23/12	06/29/12
<b>Phase 1 (Internal HECB Functionality) Analysis, Code &amp; Test</b>		
Iteration 1	09/14/11	11/10/11
Iteration 2	12/08/11	01/18/12
Iteration 3	01/19/11	02/16/12
<b>Phase 2 (External Access) Analysis, Code &amp; Test</b>		
Iteration 1	02/17/12	03/15/12
Iteration 2	06/16/12	04/19/12
Iteration 3	04/20/12	05/17/12
Iteration 4	05/18/12	06/18/12